SHRI KAMAL NATH: It is a question of policy; it is not a question of one area.

SHRI RAM NAIK: I had raised one policy matter issue which was not replied. It pertains to the introduction of the new cess or new taxes from the new accounting year or the now financial year. I have suggested that whatever new tax or new cess is levied, they should start from the First of April. So, this Act or this Bill which has a clause saying that "the Bill will come into force by Notification", I would suggest that this Bill, after it is passed, after it is assented by the President, should come into froce from the First of April, which is a new financial year so/ that everybody will be prepared for proper adjustment of the accounts; and that is easy from the administrative point of view also. On this point, the Minister has not clatified.

SHRI KAMAL NATH: This really has no linkage with the Budget; this is not a budgetary proposal. I think the hon. Member is suggesting that just like other things start from the financial year, from the First of April like the Budget, this should also start from the First of April. I don't think we should link this up with the Budget at all. This will come into force from the date of the Notification; and we will consider when this should be notified in consultation with the States' Pollution Control Boards, because we are also in a hurry to strengthens them. There is a certain amount of revenue which is going to come up out of this. We have to drive the message home about the whole object of the Bill, as I said, it to drive the message home to industry about the concept of the water, from that point of view, there is a little bit of hurry. But I shall consider the views of the hon. Members and will take a decision on this. I cannot take a view right now.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The question is: "That the Bill, as amended, be passed."

The motion was adopted.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We shall now take up the next item.

16.00 hrs.

TEA COMPANIES (ACQUISITION AND TRANSFER OF SICK TEA UNITS) AMENDMENT BILL

[*English*]

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE(SHRI SALMAN KHURSHEED): On behalf of Shri P. Chidambaram, I beg to move:

"That the Bill to amend the Tea Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Sick Tea Units) Act, 1985, be taken in into consideration."

MR. CHAIRMAN: Motion moved,

"That the Bill to amend the Tea Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Sick Tea Units) Act, 1985, be taken into consideration."

[*Transalation*]

SHRI GIRDHARI LAL BHARGAVA (Jaipur): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I beg to move:

"That the Bill be circulated for eliciting opinion there on by 24th February,1992." (1)

PROF. RASA SINGH RAWAT (Ajmer): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I beg to move:

"That the Bill be circulated for eliciting opinion thereon by 26th February, 1992." (3)

[*English*]

SHRI KABINDRA PURKAYASTHA (Silchar): Madam Chairperson, I rise to speak on the Tea companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Sick Tea Units) Amendment Bill, moved by the Commerce Minister for consideration and passing by Parliament which is essentially required . The Minister, in the Statement or Objects and Reasons of the Bill mentioned that under the Act of 1985

at four sick units were nationalised and there was scope to fulfil the claims of the employees and ex-employees of those sick tea units, which were taken over by the Government. those four sick units were, Pashok, Looksan, Vah-Tukvar and Potong.

At that time it was also accepted by the Government that when those tea units were taken over by the Government, prolonged disturbances were there in the area and normal working was disrupted. Normal working in the tea gardens was totally stopped and because of the disturbances the employees of the tea units had to go away to other places and take shelter and as a result they could not submit their claims before the date that was given by the Government for submission of the claims. Out of them 3,285 employees and ex-employees could not submit their claims duly and as a result their could not be settled, and hence from the side of the Government, it was considered that those who could not submit their claims duly because of the disturbances and other difficulties should also be given an opportunity to file their claims. That is why it was considered that the Amendment should be brought for fulfilling their claims.

Madam Chairperson, I dully support this Bill and this has to be done in the interests of the employees and ex-employees of these four sick units.

In this connection I like to just mention some other things. Wherefrom does the question of sick units come? This is the question that has to be considered by the House and also by the Government. Why do the tea gardens become sick?

This has become a problem throughout the country and particularly in Assam, where tea industry is the only industry, which earns foreign exchange. And because of tea industry, lakhs and lakhs of workers are getting employment and they are earning their livelihood. it is noticed that the production in the tea gardens is growing but the tea gardens have become sick. It is very unfortunate.

In Assam, there are 750 tea gardens in total at present and plantation done in Assam Tea gardens cover 2,20,000 hectares. The total production, at present, is 790 lakhs Kgs. of tea.

When 5,10,000 workers were working in the tea gardens the total production were 1,61,000 hectares. But, at present the number of workers has come down to 4,10,000 and the plantation area has grown from 1,61,000 hectares to 2,20,000 hectares in 1980. It is very unfortunate that the production of the plantation area has been increased but the number of workers has been reduced. Now, the managements do not absorb more regular workers but they absorb only casual workers. If they employ casual workers. then they need not give other facilities to them. As a result , the management gains but the labourers suffer.

These labourers who are working as casual labourers work occasionally and periodically and they are not getting other benefits as is being given to the regular workers. As a result, the casual labourers, who are employed for regular work, do not show interest in their work. And such is the case with the other workers also. As a result, the working condition in the tea gardens has weakened.

There is discrimination also. In Assam there are two vaileys-Brahmaputra valley and Barak valley. In Brahmaputra valley, every tea garden labourer gets Rs. 2.16 more than what the labourer gets in Barak valley. This is going on for the last many years. And for this, many movements were taken place and many discussions took place. But nothing has been done in this regard. This discrimination is still going on and there is no satisfaction among the labourers. If the managements expect the labourers to work satisfactorily, then they must give all amenities to them.

In 70 percent of the tea gardens, there is no doctor in the hospitals. In 90 percent of

[Shri Kabindra Purkayastha]

the tea gardens, there is no specified quarter for the workers. In the year 1972, the Central Government gave loans to then the tea garden managements for construction of the quarters.

All this money was diverted to other side and the quarters for the labourers were not constructed. As a result, the growth in tea industry is being hampered and a sense of dis- satisfaction or resentment is there in the tea industry.

Not only this. There are 8 Boards which are there for the betterment of the industry as well as the labour like Minimum Wages Advisory Board, Standing Labour Committee for other Plantation Workers, Medical Advisory Board for Plantation Workers, Implementation Committee, Housing Board, etc. It is unfortunate that all these Boards have not yet been constituted. They are there on the paper only. So the rules and regulations or plans and programmes are not being implemented. With the result, proper working is hampered. And definitely there is every likelihood of some sort of unrest in the tea gardens. This is what is happening in the tea gardens of Assam.

It is unfortunate that tea gardens are becoming sick. Previously tea gardens were known as tea estates. Those have now been named as tea and industry. So the management do not invest the profit that they get from the tea industry for the development of tea gardens, but it is diverted to other industries which are not even connected with the tea industry. So developmental scheme in tea gardens are not implemented properly. Perhaps, there is some hide and seek policy for which this tea industry in Assam is gradually decaying.

There are several tea gardens which were taken over by the Government owned Assam Tea Corporation. The fate of these tea gardens is far from satisfactory. There is a tea garden in my area which was taken over by the Government of Assam. At present, this tea garden is on the verge of closure especially when the management is in the hands of the Government. I am sorry to say that the management of other tea gardens takes the pleas that when the tea gardens taken over by the Government gradually close down or are on the verge of closing down, they are helpless in reviving their own tea gardens.

Then, what will be the position of the tea industry. This will be the fate of the tea gardens or tea industry throughout the country not to talk of Assam or the North East. This is one of the most important industry in the country, particularly in the North East.

So, in this connection, I must say that I am supporting this Amendment Bill in the consideration of the fate of the employees and ex-employees of the four sick tea gardens which were taken over by the Government. At the same time, I want to remind the Government that the fate of the tea gardens should be made brighter and for that the difficulties which are being faced by the tea gardens or tea industry, those are to be looked into and proper measure should be adopted for better fate of the tea industry. This is my submission.

SHRI BIJOY KRISHNA HANDIQUE (Jorhat): Madam Chairman, I rise to support the Tea Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Sick Tea Units) Amendment Bill, 1991.

The objectives of the Bill is very limited and there is not much room for discussion since only four gardens are involved and that too for specific reasons. The Government have rightly handled the problems of the employees of the tea gardens on compenssionate grounds since the climate of working was disturbed and disrupted due to prolonged turmoil in the areas. Yet, there are certain basic issues involved in the take over in general and while we are discussing the subject, I think, the House should refer to those problems too.

It is, however, interesting to note that in the present case, even though the gardens

were taken over in 1985, the issue of privatisation is so much in air today that it should though retrospectively, gives some relief and a reminder to those who are obsessed with the night mare of privatisation, So, then, the Government sometimes do public-sectorise private sector too.

Our experience of having taken over sick gardens and gardens remaining long in the sale list of big companies over the decades is not a happy one. The tea gardens remain sick, are still sick even after taking over. For only sickness is blended so well into the total bleakness of the overall financial position that it does not come to view on the surface. Sickness would not go unless the factors causing the sickness are tackled and are removed. The common causes of this sickness are poor finance, inadequate inputs, lack of additional land for extended plantation and managerial deficiency. A Government Corporation or a Board is no megic touch Unless these factors are tackled properly for finding a way out whether they are in public or private sector, things would not improve.

In Assam in 1974, quite flourising and prosperous tea gardens, of course, with staggering overheads on expenditure list were bought by a Government organisation called Assam Tea Corporation.

To them were added a number of sick gardens which were taken over not from commercial point of view but from the point of view of social security to the workers and the employees. A few tea gardens which had defaulted in provident fund obligations enlarged the size of acquisitions as if the more the merrier. But with what result? Within a span of five years, it is not just the individual gardens but the whole Corporation was afflicted with sickness and the workers and employees had to go on strike as the corporation was hard set to pay the wages and provide other statutory amenities. There was even a time when even the Tea Corporation had no money to buy tea chests and allowed the made tea to deteriorate on the floor and ultimately had to be sold at a throw away price to salvage whatever was left and mainly to pay wages to the tea garden workers.

Things, however, looked up in 1984-85 when some concrete measures were taken, but slumped back to the mess again with the change of Government in 1986. It is heartening to note that for the last two years, things have started improving after a good chunk of investment and right managerial drive. Even then the Tea Trading Corporation of India which has taken over these four tea gardens named in the Bill, have no record worth the name to boast of.

I am afraid, for doctoring, Government acquisition is ineffective Economic viability is the only criterion. Here it is not the commercial aspect alone but the social security of the workers and employees are at stake. Public or private, there will be industrial unrest if wages and other amenities were not fully assured. The case of these four gardens is, however, different as there are compelling circumstances. We, however, must not forget that tea is the major foreign exchange earner for the country and any measure that adversely affects the production is detrimental to the national interests, for, production is the first casualty of mismanagement.

So, acquisition as a doctoring venture without the necessary gears, does not cure the sickness and rather runs the risk of eating up all the resources which, if not adequately pumped in, goes waste.

We should bear in mind that we are still far behind the targeted figure of production of 875 million kgs. of tea by 2000 A.D. That is the target we have set. On the other hand, with rapid industrialisation in the country which raises the rate of domestic consumption of tea, a situation may arise when the total crop may eventually be consumed with in the country and there may not be any surplus left for export. Unless production is increased. The targeted production figure of 875 million kgs. of tea, according to an estimate, would meet the internal demand without jeopardising the export obligations. So, our primary concern is to increase the production, and sickness

[Shri Bijoy Krishna Handique]

is one of the chronic constraints in achieving this objective. If the Government is not in a position to improve things in ailing tea gardens by taking them over, then they have to provide adequate facilities to those ailing gardens so that they become viable units and the cause of production and that of economic security of the workers are both served well. Strict monitoring and vigilance and pressure by Government on the owners of such ailing companies will achieve the desired result. Since this is the cause of security for so many people, the private sector garden cannot escape the social responsibility and cannot be allowed to ignore its social objective and social commitment. it is the political will on the part of the Government which will determine the course of things.

Since the question of privatisation is mooted, I submit that this is highly essential. I believe that the hon. Minister will look into this problem and see that the level of production is increased, whether in public sector or in private sector. At the same time social and economic security for the workers and employees must be assured. No private sector garden can escape the responsibility saying that they have nothing to do with the Government. Government can pressurise them. Government can see that the level of production is maintained. Whatever inputs and facilities that are required, will have to be provided by the Government. But at the same time it is more important that the security of the workers and employees must be protected.

With these words, I support the Bill.

SHRI JITENDRA NATH DAS (Jalpaiguri): Thank you Madam for giving the opportunity. I support the Tea Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Sick Tea Units) Amendment Bill brought by the hon. Minister. There is nothing to oppose in the Bill. But while extending my support, I would like to draw the attention of the Government to certain important point. The idea of the Government is very good and there is no doubt in it. But the Government often fails to implement their ideas in practice. I submit that the tea industry is a very important industry of our country. We can earn a lot of foreign currency by exporting tea.

I had earlier an opportunity to talk to the Minister incharge of this issue and invited him to visit the Liksan Tea garden. He agreed to visit the same on his visit to Assam but he failed to keep his promise and could not visit the factory. However, I am again inviting him to visit the gardens just to see with his own eyes the deplorable condition of the gardens and pathetic condition of the workers.

16.28 hrs

[RAO RAM SINGH *in the Chair*]

In the year 1976 the Central Government, under some unwarranted circumstances, took over the charge of the four sick tea gardens, namely Luksan, Pashok, Potang and Vah-Tukvar gardens in West Bengal. They were earlier managed and organised by some private concern. Soon after the taking ove, the Government handed over these gardens to the Tea Trading Corporation of India to look after and maintain them. But the T.T.C.I. failed completely to maintain the gardens as they have no capacity to make any expenditure for the purpose of development of the garden. They met only the recurring expenditure, necessary to maintain the production of the garden. They paid on attention to the development of these gardens.

Considering the deplorable condition and deteriorating situation of these tea gardens, the Government enacted the the Tea Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Sick Tea Units) Act, 1985.

Just after the low was enacted, they nationalised all these gardens and handed them over to the TTCI again for the development and management. That is to pour old wine in the new bottles—the TTCI

is again asked to develop and manage all those gardens. At that time a Commissioner was appointed by the Government to make the payment due to the employees of these sick gardens. Here, a Tughlaki decision had been taken at that time that after 27th June 1989 no claim would be entertained from the side of the employees of these gardens. As a result, huge claims amounting to more than Rs. one crore were remaining unaccepted in the light of this decision. On the other hand, the aggregate loss in the gardens begins to increase day by day. Now it is 1991. All these sick gardens have become more sick. They are at the point of closure. I am sorry to say that whereas all the neighbouring tea gardens are blooming with prosperity, there the TTCI managed gardens are incurring heavy losses day by day. I think this is due to the indifferent and callous attitude of the TTCI. The TTCI is mainly a trading organisation. They have got no knowledge about the management of these tea gardens and they have no infrastructure. So, to improve these gardens, the TTCI will have to change their outlook and attitude.

I had an opportunity to point out some difficulties faced by the workers of these gardens in the Zero Hour of the Parliament Session held on 4.9.91. In these gardens there is want of gunny bags, paucity of water including drinking water, want of tractors, irregular payment to workers, irreguiar deposition of P.F. money and non -payment of PF and qratuity money to the retired employees, low rates of bonus to the employees in comparison with that in other neighbouring gardens. For the proper management and to make these gardens viable, huge capital expenditure, capital investment is needed. All these are leading the workers of these gardens in a dangerous position.

Again, 60 percent of the trees are above 50 years of age. Therefore, increasing yield and quality tea are not possible from these sick gardens. I want to explain again that here the new plantation and the extension programme are to be undertaken immediately in all these gardens.

The TTCI will have to change their attitude, as I have mentioned before. I think the problem to improve these sick gardens will not be solved only by considering the Category-1 claims of these employees, but also the difficulties faced by the workers of these gardens are to be solved immediately. While considering all this, I urge upon the Government to look into the matter and to go deep into the matter. The Government and the TTCI should come together to save all these gardens which are on the verge of closure.

SHRI MUMTAZ ANSARI(Kodarma) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, there is nothing in this Bill just to oppose or to support to a greater extent. But sickness in industrial units or tea gardens, whatever it may be, it has become a continuous process. So, this is not only a question of taking over or transfer of tea units, but rather it is very much important and a pertinent question to go into the details and the reasons responsible for such sickness in tea units. So, that is why I have gone into the details of the sickness and I find that there are certain factors which are responsible for such sickness which are partly man made and partly artificial and they may be factual also to some extent.

The first factor responsible for the sickness among the tea units or tea gardens is that they are not being looked after with much care and caution and that is why such problems are cropping up. The second most important factor which is responsible for the sickness of the units is that the whole management has become inefficient, unmanageable or unwieldy. That is why it is better to point out the inefficiency or deficiency on the part of the management rather than to only acquire and just transfer the assets and liabilities of such sick units. The third factor which is responsible for the sickness of the tea units is that the welfare measures and the social security measures are also not being implemented fully and to a satisfactory extent for the amelioration and betterment of the labourers who are working in the tea gardens. So, this is also partly responsible for the sickness in tea

[Sh. Mumtaz Ansari]

units or tea gardens and the next factor which is responsible primarily for the sickness of such units is that generally funds are also diverted from such type of tea gardens or plantations to other sources of earing income. This is very much alarming and this should also be stopped with all efforts.

Similarly, there is some sort of social and political unrest in certain parts of the country, especially speaking, in Assam, there is political instability and there is political and social unrest. This is also causing a lot of troubles to the enterpreneurs or to those persons who are engaged in tea producing units. So, these are the causes or factors which are responsible for sickness in tea units.

Now, I would like to suggest that before going into the liquidation of such sick units, it is better to ponder over the factors which are responsible for sickness of such tea units, because these tea units are not only domestic industries, but rather these are industries of tremendous importance and are earning a lot of foreign exchange from foreign countries. Once this process of sickness of such tea units is allowed to continue, this will tell upon the foreign exchange earning also.

This will also persuads other units to fall to this trap. So, before going to the liquidation of such sick units, I would like to suggest that once the assets and liabilities of such sick units are being acquired or transferred or taken over bythe Government, the Government must pay attention to the fact that those thousands of employees who will be thrown out of employment must be absorbed adequately, appropriately at various levels. This is also the question of employment. All the time we are crying at the top of voice in the House for giving employment to a large number of unemployed persons in the country. But when such sick units, on the just pretext of sickness; are closed down, those units will throw a large number of people out of employment also.

My suggestion is, once such units are taken over by the Government or are liquidated or are amalgamated, the fate of the employees must not hang in balance. Those employees who are likely to be thrown out of employment must be absorbed somewhere or some alternative arrangement must be made.

Similarly, if there is any chance or possibility, such type of sick units must be revived at the earliest or all efforts in hand must be made in order to revive such units and to expand such industries so that those units may provide greater and greater employment to a large number of people.

Similarly, such acquisition or transfer may not give any inspiration or temptation to other tea units which are tempt to be sick on one pretext or the other.

Last but not the least, the profit and loss account or the balance sheet of such units should not be the only consideration while transferring assets and liabilities of such units. Rather the social aspects or the social responsibilities or social object of such units must also be taken into consideration while making acquisition and transfer of such sick units.

These are my humble suggestions to the Minister concerned.

SHRI SUDHIR SAWANT(Rajapur): Mr.Chairman, Sir, I rise to support the amending Bill to the Tea Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Sick Tea Units) Act, 1985. Though the amendment is quite limited in its content, it is related to a wider issue. This Tea Companies Act, 1985 was enacted to nationalise four tea companies. Before this, in 1976, the management of tea units was taken over by the Government. At that time, the pre-take over liability of this concern was Rs. 1.65 and had a total negative net worth of rupees one crores. The management of these four companies was totally inadequate and it was mismanaged

and these companies were run down by the management. Hence the Government had to intervene as the future of 3,000 employees was at stake at that time. However, at that time when the tea companies were nationalised, the Government had intended to do massive investment to bring these companies back to life. But what the position is as on today is not known. The infrastructure of these tea companies has further deteriorated. The problem of 3,000 workers has not been resolved in spite of having nationalised these companies in 1985 and six years having passed.

Basically, the workers of these tea companies are from backward communities and from tribals and their condition is extremely bad. The workers of the tea companies have traditionally been exploited over the ages and , that is why, having nationalised the companies, they have not been able to do justice to these workers who have been employed. One fundamental reason is that these tea companies were given to the TTCI which is a trading concern and not a management concern. Basically they had no experience of managing tea companies and that is why, the tea companies were totally mismanaged. Now after 1985 till 1991, six years have passed and the situation has completely changed and when we view the situation in the context of the policy of liberalisation which is adopted by the Government and from the point of view of the subsequent policy of "Export of perish", if you take this into account, what is the future of this Act? That is the question. Are we going to continue with the nationalisation or whether the Government is formulating some other schemes so that the sick tea companies can be revised and justice is done to the workers who are employed in these tea companies.

SHRI SRIKANTA JENA (Cuttack): Again privatise. Again back to the same old thing.

SHRI SUDHIR SAWANT: I have not suggested privatisation as yet. But the very fact is this policy is related to the governmental policy of bringing the economy back to light. We must remember that tea as a commodity is one of the top foreign exchange earners and hence tea is not merely the issue of North or South where it is grown but this is a national issue affecting the economy of the country. That is why, we should be very serious about it.

There is a major shortfall in production of tea. In 1990, 716 million KG of tea was produced in this country against a target of 670 million KG.

The export has stagnated at the level of 200 million KG for the last five years where the target today is 285 million KG.

In fact, there has been a demand from the industry to import tea so that we can export.

The question is of domestic consumption which is around 600 million tea cups a day. The domestic consumption is rising at the rate of 4.8% per year where as the rate of growth of production of tea is contained around 3.8%. Hence the question will come tomorrow whether we can export tea at all. Having identified it as one of the top ten foreign exchange earners, tomorrow we can come to a situation where we cannot export tea at all because of the domestic consumption and therefore, something has to be done drastically and some drastic action has to be taken immediately.

Another factor is the export of tea. This has been decling over a period of time. Mind you, India was one of the major tea producing and tea exporting countries. But this position is no more in existence now.

In the international tea trade in 1980, our percentage of export is 26%.

In 1985 , it came down to 22%.

In 1990, it has come down further to 18% whereas if you take China, it produces 80% of tea of what we produce but it has exported 209 million KG of tea in 1990 i.e., 9 million KG more than India.

[Shri Sudhir Sawant]

We have lost our position to Africa. The African tea is now being exported to the U.K. and accepted in U.K. We should not be satisfied that Sri Lanka has also gone down in this trade. Something has to be done about this thing also. That is why there is no time to lose. Something has to be done to bridge the gap between the rise in domestic consumption and the rate of growth of production. What has been done?

Sir, in this connection I would like to say that two years ago, the Tea Board has come out with a status paper which suggested the causes of the present situation which we are facing. The causes that were given by the Tea Board were many. One was about the management deficiencies, whcih is a fact. Most of the tea companies which are sick today are due to management deficiencies or aggressive trade unionism. So, we have to do something to rectify the situation.

The next cause is the financial stringency because tea requires heavy investment and this investment has not been forthcoming so far. The third reason was lack of technical know-how. Now, the per hectare production of tea in this country is around 16.50 kgs may be 17 kgs, I may be wrong. But with the improved technology we can certainly improve and increase the tea production to around 3000 kgs. This is one factor which we have to keep in mind. what are they doing about this fact?

The next cause is that of flood and soil erosion. Steps have to be taken to improve this condition. Further, there are ownership disputes and litigations in the Courts which have to be resolved. Moreover, there is lack of developmental action. These are some of the reasons given by the Tea Board for the continued sickness of the Tea Industry and the shortfall in production. Against this, when the Congress Government has come to power, the Government has initiated some steps. One of the steps was that the Centre has asked the Tea Board to persuade the owners of the sick tea units to give them to the tea estates or companies which are well managed. This is one good suggestion. But the Main problem has not been touched at all. The main problem is the rate of taxation. With the rise in domestic consumption, tea has become a necessity of life in India. The consumer has to pay heavy price and the tea industries are also sick because of the taxation. There has to be tax reform so that the tea production is increased and the domestic consumer may also get it at a price; which he can afford. Will this be made as part of the Public Distribution System? That has also got to be examined as on date.

The second aspect is that we have to bring more land under the bush. There is no chioce to that. For that, we will have to deploy funds. We will have to deploy investment plus technology plus expertise so that more land is brought under the bush. Soil conservation measures to control floods must be under taken. These are some important steps that we will have to undertake.

Apart from this, there is delay in deployment of development funds into the tea industry. The tea companies are repairing large profits and these profits are not ploughed back towards development of the tea estates and this is one of the reasons for the sickness of the tea industry and the tea estates.

Now, I am coming to the fag end of my speech. But what is to be seen is that whatever profits accure from the tea business for the tea estates, they have to be ploughed back. For that, you have to again do some tax reforms so that these funds are deployed in a proper manner.

Sir, the hon. Minister Shri Salman Khursheed has extended support to all these issues when he has spoken just a little while before. I am sure that the Government is seized of this problem and will take firm action to retrieve the situation. There are some measures which we have to think of and implement the policy in this regard. One is more land is to be brought under tea cultivation.

Then we have to explore areas which are not traditional like Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and some other portions in the country where tea can be grown. This has to be promoted. The Agriculture Ministry has to now think of promoting this in areas where tea has never been thought of being cultivated. But the conditions should be suitable.

The second factor is the increasing per hectare yield of tea. The third is the tax reforms which we have to undertake so that we can promote this industry. And then we require massive investment.

There are many sick tea companies. what are we going to do about that? That is another question which we have to address whether we are satisfied with nationalising these four tea companies or whether we are going to privatise it. This is the question today and the Government will, I am sure, come with the answer.

We must see one thing that the welfare of the labour force employed in the tea gardens has to be ensure and at no stage should we contemplate closure of a tea estate or tea gardens. We must rejuvinate them, bring them to life so that production of tea is increased. We can have some amount of tea for domestic consumption as well as for maximum export.

With this, I would also request that the quantity of tea in the Parliament should also improve. I would urge upon the Government to take stock of the entire situation and take firm action so that tea industry is brought back to life, it vibrates and we earn maximum foriegn exchange possible.

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA(Bankura): Chairman, Sir, This Tea Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Sick Tea Units) Amendment Bill has been necessitated because the time for payment of dues to the workers had to be extended. This is a simple Bill. But still we can discuss the number of aspects of this Tea Trading Corporation of India(TTCI). It is a public sector company and it was mainly set up for export of tea. This company incurred huge losses in joint venture and at that time the Chairman of the company entered into a contract with the foreign tea companies of Libia, Iran and so on. And when the then Chairman left the company, the company incurred huge losses amounting to more than Rs. 9 crores only because of entering into foreign contract.

These four sick garden companies were taken over and handed over to this company. But at that time, this company had no expertise to manage tea gardens. And subsequently, in the year 1985, this Act was enacted and these gardens were nationalised and all these tea companies were handed over to TTCI.

17.00 hrs

The company is incurring losses for a number of years. It is not because of the mismanagement of the gardens; but it is a glaring example as to how a public sector company has been delibrateiy made sick. The sick gardens were handed over to TTCI; but what was to be done to make these gardens viable and the steps which had to be taken to revive these gardens were not taken at that time. Even investment was not made.

I visited one of the gardens, TESO. The quality of tea of that garden is very good. We also purchased Maya and Animal Bar tea from TTCI. It is a very good quality of tea. But if you visit the garden, you will find the difference between the garden of the TTCI and the garden of Birlas. These two gardens are side by side. How Birlas invest and how their tea plants are maintained is seen to be believed. But in TTCI garden, even the worn-out machinery is there and this is not replaced.

In the beginning of this year one action plan was submitted to this Ministry by the TTCI for revamping of those gardens. Some suggestions were made to bring new areas under tea plantation and to replace those machineries. I have seen those old

[Shri Basudev Acharia]

machineries and how the processing is done in TESO tea garden. Outmoded method is still there in those gardens. So suggestions were made to replace those machineries. One suggestions was made from the Ministry also. As funds will not be available , they thought where from the funds will come. So the Ministry asked the management to sell out one of the gardens to find resources for the revamping, for the replacement of the machinery.

The case is with the Supreme Court because the erstwhile owner went to the Calcutta High Court. In all cases, the Calcutta High Court give judgement in favour of the private owners. In that case also the Calcutta High Court gave judgement to restore the garden to the erstwhile owner and the company went to the Supreme Court. I have with me one letter to show as to how a member of the Council of Ministers can write to another member of the Council of Ministers recommending for selling out or handing over of the gardens to the erstwhile owner.

Shri Kalp Nath Rai, Minister of Power and Non-Conventional Energy has written to the Minister of Commerce, Shri P. Chidambaram to consider that proposal. I have got the letter and I can even authenticate it.

SHRI P. C. THOMAS (Mavattupuzha): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I am on a point of order. If it is an allegation which the Member is going to make and if it is against a Minister who is a Member of this House, it should be under the rules.

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA: It is not an allegation; I am just citing an example, citing a case to show as to how a Minister is writing to another Minister recommending that the garden be handed over to the erstwhile owner.

SHRI P. C. THOMAS: If it is not an allegation, we can consider it as his own views.

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA: My Lunch is that the Government is not taking steps to revive this company, not giving any money for revamping the garden. Although it is a fact that it had no infrastructure at the time when the Management of the garden was handed over to the TTCI, even at that time, if the steps had been taken and if take suggestions in the action plan which was submitted by the Management had been accepted, these gardens could have been made viable now. The tea gardens in West Bengal, in my district Purulia and in Keonghar, Orissa also are prodsucing the best covered under under tea plantation. why this company should incur loss is my main point. For a number of years, there was no Chairman, no Managing Director. There was only a part time Managing Director. The Vice Chairman of Tea Board was there to look after TTCI. The Vice Chairman of Tea Board was entrusted with the work of the TTCI, a part time job. There was no full time Managing Director, full time Chairman of the company. How can it function unless the management is strengthened? Now you are blaming the public sector company that it is incurring losses and the garden should be handed over to the erstwhile owner. And now, one Minister is writing to another Minister that he should consider the proposal to hand over the garden to the erstwhile owner, since the TTCI cannot manage.

There are other nationalised garden. So, why should all those gardens not be brought under one umbrella? All those nationalised gardens should be brought under the umbrella, under one organisation. In West Bengal, the sick tea gardens, abandoned by the erstwhile owners, were taken over by the State Government-Tea development Corporation. Then, Tea Development Corporation was formed. If Tea Development Corporation of West Bengal can earn profit, why cannot the TTCI? I urge upon the Minister to think over it and enlighten us about the proposals that the Government would take to revive those gardens. Is the Government thinking on those lines or to sell out one of the gardens?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Acharia, Kindly

wind up.

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA: The Birlas and Tatas are after these gardens because tea business is now a very profitable business. All are coming to the tea business. So, I urge upon the Minister to ponder over this. I hope he will reply to our points and also enlighten this House about the steps the Government is going to take to revive, revamp and to make the TCCI a viable company. With these words I conclude and I thank you very much for giving me this opportunity.

SHRI RAJAGOPAL NAIDU RAMASWAMY (periyakulam): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I thank you for giving me an opportunity to participate in this discussion on Tea Companies Bill.

The Bill seeks to extend the period by which claimats for compensation can file their claims pursuant to takeover of four sick tea units. This is essential in the interest of natural justice. I support the measure on behalf of AIADMK.

I would like to take this opportunity to say a few more words about the tea plantation labour in the country. I had seen with my eyes the plight of tea plantation labour especially in Meghamalai in my Periyakulam constituency in Uttampalayam taluk. I was told that the conditions were those in Assam and other areas.

They are not being paid their statutory *minimum* wages. Their wages should be increased and they should be relieved from the clutches of *thekedars*. These *thekedars* exploit the poor tea leave pickers. All kinds of constract labour systems should be abolished and Labour Commissioners must inspect the plantations on weekly basis to see that there are no contract labourers. Offenders must be severely punished. All employees on casual terms in tea plantations and tea companies for the past three years must be regularised.

Presently, the tea companies pay divided only to their employees. The labourers in the tea plantations are forgotten. They are the basic workers in tea production. Therefore, all tea companies must be made to earmark a portion of their profits for ex gratia payment to plantation labourers.

Mostly women are employed in tea plantations. During pregnancy and during lactation time, they should be given four months'leave with wages. Owners of plantations should be compelled to set up creches for taking care of the children till they grow.

I had seen that the children of the plantation labour are the most neglected. There are no schools no by the plantations thus obstructing the spread of education. Steps should be taken mandatorily to set up a school nearby every tea plantation.

Tea dust causes respiratory diseases. Special care hospitals must be set up in every plantation so that tea plantation labourers are constantly under medical attention.

Sir, the wages paid to the labourers are very poor. Tea export is earning a lot of foreign exchange. The Government should create a fund for formulating and implementing a special scheme of cheap housing for the tea plantation labourers.

As the labourer in tea plantations are prone to specific disorder, the Centre should provide an insurance scheme to all the plantation labourers so that a bit of financial advantage flow to their families.

I hope hon. Minister would consider the above suggestions and reply to them.

With these words, I support this Bill.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Ramaswamy has given very good suggestions and I am sure that the Minister will take note of them. Shri Amar Roy Pradhan.

SHRI AMAR ROYPRADHAN (Cooch

[Shri Amar Roy Pradhan]

Bihar): Mr. Chairman, Sir, this is a very simple Bill. I lend my best support to the Bill. As regards the working class dues, about one crore and twenty six lakhs are due. Naturally, it cannot be paid just now. If you attend to this, I lend my support.

Mr. Chairman Sir, through you, I would like to know the position of other tea gardens from the hon. Minister. An alarming situation is there in tea gardens. If administration goes on in this way in the tea gardens, then, I think, in the near future so many tea gardens will be sick. Firstly, the Government does not take care of these tea gardens. We export tea and we are earning about 1000 crores of rupees of foreign exchange every year. Even then, it is with the Commerce Department alone. It is an agro industry. Though it is an agro industry, it is neither with agriculture nor with industry. It is with the Commerce Department because it is very much interested in trade alone. This trade department do not know the difference between the leaves of various kinds of tea and the difference between two leaves and a bud. Darjeeling tea is so famous. We are exporting so much of tea to foreign countries like Russia, London and some other countries and even then, there is a strong lobby inside this country and we are very much in the hope of importing tea either from Kenya or Sri Lanka. Why is it so? It is because the Commerce Department do not care for the tea bushes. They only like to have more leaves and more weight in terms of kilograms. They import tea from Kenya and Sri Lanka and they are exporting Darjeeling tea to foreign countries so that they can earn money.

But if you leave the tea bushes in such a manner, ultimately, you will not be able to earn any foreign money. Have you gone through the records and found out as to how much tea is being sold in the name of Darjeeling tea and how much tea is actually being produced in the Darjeeling tea plantations? And who are the people that are selling the tea in the name of Darjeeling tea? There is a lot of good will in the name of Darjeeling tea. But if it is misused, that good will would be destroyed and the entire export business will be at a great loss.

Sir, we have got enough scope to improve our production. We can do a lot of improve our position in the world market. We are producing 6.85 lakh metric tonnes and our production per hectare is 1712 on an average. On the other hand in China the production is 5.92 lakh metric tonnes but their yield per hectare is only 428. But they are taking a lot of trouble to produce more. On an average, India is producing 28 to 29 per cent and China is producing 23 per cent. Next to China, Sri Lanka produces 8.36 per cent, Kenya 7.31 per cent and the Soviet Union 5.78 percent. In any way, we do have a lot of scope to produce more if only we take some special care. I say this because in China the per hectare production is only 428.But even they are producing more. But in India, it is the other way. Even though we have the scope, we are not producing much.

if you go through the reports, you will find the truth. As pointed out by Shri Basu Deb Acharia there are some vested interests who are trying to scuttle the non conventional methods of tea production.There is a lot of scope in Orissa, Meghalaya and in the Ayodhya Hills of West Bengal to produce tea through these non conventional methods. But the Tea Board is not helping in any way. Your machinery works only through this Tea Board and the TCCI which in my opinion are white elephants. If you are really interested in increasing the tea production in the country, you must come forward with some concrete measures instead of the proposals that you have put forth through the TCCI.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please come near to the mike. The Members are nor able to hear *properly.*

SHRI AMAR ROYPRADHAN: I wonder why my voice has become so weak. Though I am growing old, I am young and energetic at heart!

MR. CHAIRMAN: That is the result of

Darjeeling tea, I think!

SHRI AMAR ROYPRADHAN: I was pointing out what Shri Basu Deb Acharia has said with regard to certain lobby which is working against the interests of the non conventional tea producing areas. These non conventional methods have already been started in Orissa and Meghalaya. It has also been started in the far west of West Bengal, in the Ayodhya Hills in Purulia District, just adjacent to the State of Bihar. So, what I am saying is that there is ample scope for the non conventional methods of producing tea. In all these areas, we have got a good prospect of producing better tea.

We are earning a lot of foreign exchange from it. We can have gold from this foreign exchange. So, I would like to request the hon. Minister, the Prime Minister, please do not depend only on the Tea Board and the TTCI instead you chalk out some programme and implement it. My request is that you should not only take the conventional areas but non conventional areas also because if you have more areas under production you can have more product. In this way there is a greate scope for export and thus to earn more foreign exchange.

With these words I support this Bill.

SHRI SRIBALLAV PANIGRAHI (Deogarh): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I have the pleasure to support this Bill. As stated earlier by the speakers from both the sides of the House, there is absolutely no controversy over this Bill. As you know, Sir, this Bill bears ample evidence, ample tesitmony to the pro-labour attitude of this Government. This Bill itself is a fitting reply to the Opposition who were only yesterday accusing the Government of adopting a very callous and indifferent attitude towards the dismissed employees. They were making the allegation that the Government is anti-labour. But I emphatically say that this Bill itself is a befitting reply. The last day for finalisation of the claims of the employees of the Tea Estates which were nationalised long back in 1985 was up to the 28th day of April...

SHRI AMAR ROYPRADHAN: You did not give any publicity. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI SRIBALLAV PANIGRAHI : There are some reasons like dismanagement, large scale absential and so on. And, if Amar basu says so then I would say that to some extent it is responsility of the peoples' representatives to educate them to file papers in time.

Anyway, there are still about 3285 cases pending.

SHRI AMAR ROY PRADHAN: Sir, I do not know what is the responsibility of the peoples' representatives in this regard.

SHRI SRIBALLAV PANIGRAHI: Our responsibility lies in every area. Some times we find the cases pending even after a decade. As I can say with regard to the Chowkidar abolition in Orissa.

So, I was saying that about 3200 cases are still pending involving a sum of Rs. 12833622. So, I congratulate the Government that although late, they have realised this and come out with this piece of legislation.

Of Course, there is a lot of talk about privatisation. But this is a Bill which relates to the nationalisation of sick units. There is nothing much in this Bill and it enjoys support form all sides. We are all interested to help the employees and at same time, tea production needs greater attention of the Government. It is causing anxiety. I was rather disturbed to learn that once upon a time we were the top tea producing country of the world. It is one of our top ten foreign exchange earning items. In terms of quantity, quality and export, we were first in the world. But we do not enjoy that position today. Now, Sri Lanka occupies the first position. Now, again, our neighbouring country, that is China has dislodged was from the second position and pushed us to the third position by exceeding our export target. We are now exporting 200 million Kgs. of tea. China has surpassed us and they are exporting 205

million Kgs. of tea. This is causing anxiety.

17.32 hrs.

RE NATION WIDE BANDH ON 29TH NOVEMBER, 1991

[*English*]

SHRI A . CHARLES (Trivandrum): I would like to draw the attention of the Leader of the House about a very serious mattter. The Leader of the House is here.

Just now I have contacted some newspapers about the Bandh tomorrow. Tomorrow, the Offices will be closed. There will be a nation wide Bandh. The people have already left their offices. We are concerned about the whole situation. I would like to know from the Leader of the House, whether the government has received any notice regarding this and if so, what is the reaction of the Government? Tomorrow, we are having the sitting. We are not sure how we are going to come here.What about our security? What is going to happen to this country? What about our transport?

The time has now come when the Government should react. What about the Officers and staff who are working all over the country?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you concerned about the security?

SHRI A. CHARLES: I am not only concerned with the security but also other things. They have informed that the nation wide bandh would paralyse the life in the country. This is very important matter.

SHRI AMAR ROYPRADHAN: It will be a peaceful Bandh. There will be a peaceful strike throughtout India.

SHRI A. CHARLES: Have you received any notice that the whole nation will be observing Bandh tomorrow? There will be a strike all over the country. we are concerned about the whole situation. Have you received any notice and if so what action has been taken by the Government?

Whether there are any negotiations going on with the trade unions; and whether the trade unions are responding in a responsive manner. The Leader of the House is here. With Your permission, I would like to seek clarification from him on these points.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do you want to know whether it has come to the notice of the Government or not whether there would be a strike tomorrow?

SHRI A. CHARLES: If it has come to the notice of the Government, whether in the evening are they issuing any orders in this respect?(*Interrutions*)

SHRI P.C.CHACKO: Without any justification, the strike is going to take place.

SHRI SRIBALLAV PANIGRAHI: It is a politically motivated strike.

SHRI AMAR ROYPRADHAN : It will be a peaceful strike throughout India tomorrow. There is no question of security.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Has it come to the notice of the House whether there would be a stirke tomorrow? If the Leader of the House thinks it fit, he may kindly give a reply.

THE MINISTER OF HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT (SHRI ARJUN SINGH): Respected Sir, it is in the notice of the Government that some trade unions want to go on a strike tomorrow. I do not dispute the right of any trade union to go on a strike; they are entitled to do so. What I would like to state very categorically is that the new Industrial Policy that was introduced, discussed in this House approved in this House, of course, with some dissenting voices, during the discussion, the Prime Minister very categorically stated in the last session of Parliament that the Government will fully protect the interest of the labour class, because this Government can never be oblivious to the basic interest of the

working people in this country.

Secondly, the fact that certain steps have been suggested should be seen in their correct perspective. A Tripartite Committee has been set up specifically for this purpose so that any misapprehension or apprehension on this account should be discussed across the table and solution found. My esteemed colleague, Mr. P.A. Sangma is charing that Committee. A meeting was held on the 17th of this month. The next meeting is scheduled for 20th December. So far as the issues are concerned. I do not want to go into them just now because the fact is that this House and the Rajya Sabha are scheduled to discuss the entire gamut of this issue next week in the House. In these circumstances, all I would like to say, I would like to appeal to every one who is contemplating to go on a strike, the issues they want to highlight which they seem to underline are already the issues on which the Prime Minister has come out categorically with an assurance in favour of the working class. Still, if there is something which needs to be discussed, forums are there which can be discussed. This House is going to discuss that. It would not be in the fitness of things to go on a strike at this juncture. I would like to make an appeal to all those trade unions who have decided their right to decide I do not question but I have to have the right to make an appeal to them that perhaps this strike would not serve any purpose, the purpose which they want to serve can be served in another way for which this Government's doors are always open.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Who are the parties in the Tripartite Committee?

SHRI ARJUN SINGH: All these trade unions the Government, the trade unions and the industry.

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA (Bankura): A decision was taken long back, two months ago, in a convention where all national trade unions including INTUC were present in that convention where a decision was taken to go on a token strike on the 29th November, 1991.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please come to the point. The Leader of the House categorically stated that he does not deny the right of the trade unions to go on a strike. But he has also got a right to make an appeal to the trade unions which he has done.

[*Translation*]

What is your point?

[*English*]

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA: On the one hand, the Government is making appeals and on the other hand they are taking steps to close down the units. Already a number of units have been closed down in West Bengal. Haldia Fertilizers has been closed down. (*Interruptions*)

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please sit down. As the leader of the House has pointed out, the Prime Minister has already agreed to have a discussion where the whole gamut of the New Industrial Policy will discussed ans some of the question of closing down of units, I am sure, will from part of that discussion. This was the only point I raised by Shri Charles and the Leader of the House has answered it very adequately.

I would now like Shri Panigrahi to continue his speech.

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA: The Leader of the House must say whether the Government will withdraw its policy or not.

MR. CHAIRMAN: This is not the place for the Leader to make a commitment. Now this matter is closed and nothing will be recorded.

(*Interruptions*)*

MR. CHAIRMAN: I am sorry, this is not

* Not Recorded.

the time to got an assurance from the Leader of the House on that issue. Let us preceed according to rules. How do you except him at this time to give an assurance that the policy will not be implemented? I am sorry.

Shri Charles, Please sit down.

Shri Panigrahi, will you please continue your speech? You better wind up now.

17.42 hrs.

TEA COMPANIES (ACQUISITION AND TRANSFER OF SICK TEA UNITS) AMENDMENT BILL (Contd.)

[*English*]

SHRI SRIBALLAV PANIGRAHI: I will only take two minutes more. I was stating that in India, which is the number one country in respect of tea production how has the sort of situation been created.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have already dealt with it adequately.

SHRI SRIBALLAV PANIGRAHI: Our domestic production is growing steadily, at the rate of more than 4.8 per cent per year, rate of Growth of production is as low as 3.1 per cent. About 600 million cups of tea are being consumed in India daily whereas the position in China is different.

SHRI P.C. THOMAS: Has the Prime Minister come back, Sir? Somebody is sitting in the seat of the Prime Minister. I was just thinking whether the Prime Minister has come back.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Shri Girdhari Lal Bhargava, I am told that nobody is allowed to sit in the Prime Minister's seat. In fact, I am not keen on this rule but I am told that nobody is allowed to sit there.

SHRI AMAR ROYPRADHAN: It is the convention of the House that nobody else should sit in the Prime Minister's seat.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I am sure that when you are in a position to occupy that seat, you can sit there.

SHRI SRIBALLAV PANIGRAHI: In China where the production of tea is about 80 per cent compared to our production figure it is improving steadily its share of global tea experts.

It has increased from 12.5 per cent in 1980 to 14.27 per cent in 1985 and further to 16.77 per cent in 1990. India's export position has dropped from 26 per cent in 1980 to 22 percent in 1985 and further to 18 percent in 1990. And as I understand, it is now as low as 14 percent.

It is therefore required to raise both our production and productivity. How can we do that? We have to increase the area of the plantation and at the same time we have to go in for more advanced technology and management methods.

Out of the total number of 13,570 tea estates in our country, there are about 145 weak and sick units and only about four or very little number we have taken over.

In this connection I would like to mention that West Bengal is a prominent tea growing State. When the hon. Members from West Bengal took part in the discussion, one thing struck my mind as to why they do not take it up eith their State Government so that they can also develop some tea estate themselves. What is thw harm? (*Interruptions*)

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA(Bankura): West Bengal has Tea Development Corporation.

SHRI SRIBALLAV PANIGRAHI: I have said about plantation itself, ten estate itself..(*Interruptions*)

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA: You hand over these gardens to the West Bengal Tea

Development Corporation.

SHRI SRIBALLAV PANIGRAHI: I would say that it is a good suggestion. If there are interested to take charge of the sick units, then there should be negotiation..(*Interruptions*) You take over them and reactivate them. What is the harm?(*Interruptions*)

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA: There are sick gardens under Tea Development Corporation of the Government of West Bengal. There is a proposed to have these gardens also. If the Central Government hand over these gardens to the Tea Development Corporation, the West Bengal Government can manage them...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI SRIBALLAV PANIGRAHI: I do not know what authority he has got on behalf of the State Government to give this suggestion here. Of course, their Chief Minister is moving around. He is going abroad to invite private enterpreneurs to invest money also. Any way, I would say that if the concerned State Governments are willing to take over the sick units tea estates, then, i think, it should be encouraged.

That is my suggestion.

This year we had the target of the tea production at about 735 million Kg. But in real terms, I am given to understand that it will be 726 million kg. The only answer, as I said, is to raise both our production and productivity. It means that new areas are to be added and the areas are available. Also the activities of the TTCI and others need close monitoring.

The Government should chalk out a very reasonable and a very sensible policy, which among other things, should restore India's image as the top tea producing and exporting country in the world.

With these words, I support this Bill. This Bill has very limited purpose. Of course. when there is a Bill, apart from its purpose , it provides an opportunity for a general discussion. I request the hon.Minister to take advantage of the suggestions that are given to promote tea industry further in the country.

SHRI DWARKA NATH DAS (Karim Ganj): I shall confine my speech to the Tea Companies Amendment Bill 1991. Of course, in principle I lend support to this Bill. But the scope and the purview of this Bill is so narrow that it cannot touch even the fringe of the problem what to speak of the problem itself.

It is a matter of serious concern that tea gardens of Assam gradually become less productive than before. it is due to mismanagement on the one hand and lack of supervision from the side of the Government on the other. It is seen that during the last three decades tea gardens are growing substantially in Sri Lanka and even in Africa. And I fear that during the coming decades tea production in the said countries may surpass the production of India. Tea is our largest foreign exchange earner but in the near future, we cannot retain this position. We notice slackness in administration everywhere. And tea industry is not an exception.

There are hundreds of literature on tea industry but in actually nothing substantial is done to improve the working of the tea estates. Shifting of responsibility on the part of the Centre amounts to disservice to this industry. And in course of time, this indifference will prove havoc.

There are several unions to safeguard the interest of the tea labourers, but they are play things in the hands of the owners; otherwise, the tea estates of Assam would not have come to this present awful condition. In most of the gardens in Barak Valley I find that there are no adequate schooling facilities for the children, no hospital, electrification, watersupply, approach roads, etc. The labourers are compelled to live below the subsistence level. In this connection, I would like to tell a sad story. In my constituency,

[Shri Dwarkanath Das]

Karim Ganj, I visited two tea gardens- Singhlacherra Tea Estate and Maguracherra Tea Estate. When I visited, I saw these two gardens under injunction because of ownership dispute. But, I am least concerned with the ownership dispute what is surprising is that the plucking was stopped for months together and I felt, You will also agree with me, that this is sheer wastage and a national loss. At the same time, these labourers are not getting wages and as a result they have to starve. These sort of things are going on unabated.

The acreage of plantation is no doubt growing in some cases but engagement of labourers is dwindling i.e. less input, more output at the cost of labourers. And as a result there is lay off creating the problem of huge ex-tea garden labourers. They are unfortunate in every sense as because they are not tillers of land nor labourers of gardens. In my budget speech, I have mentioned that there should be all inclusive welfare scheme to save these persons from starvation and to draw out them from sub human condition.

As regards, sick tea gardens, condition of Border District of KarimGanj is the worst. The gardens there are the safe hide-out of the infiltrators alongwith their encroachment notoriety and unlawful habitation. This unlawful habitation is being continued because of narrow political motivation and in near future it would not be surprising that some prosperous tea estates will lose their existance and turn into unwanted human habitation.

The State Government of Assam is not at all in a position to save such sick gardens because of trouble some condition prevailing there or look after the well being of the labourers. I am of the opinion that to revitalise these sick gardens of Assam particularly of Karimganj District, there should be one comprehensive scheme and to undertake a through survey of the whole of the estates so that this top-most national industry could regain its prosperity.

18.00 hrs.

In this regard, only the Centre could come forward to its rescue.

Monopoly of Assam tea in the world maket has gone down in recent years because of indifference on the part of the Centre and incapability on the part of the State, I mean the State of Assam. A realistic approach to solve this gigantic problem is expected soon from the Government of India.

With this, I conclude my speech with the hope that the Centre will make all out efforts to revitalise the sick tea gardens of Assam. Thank You, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Shri Piyus Tiraky.

An hon. Member: It is six o'clock, Sir. How can he speak unless the time of the House is extended?

MR.CHAIRMAN: Let him start so that he can continue tomorrow.

[*Translation*]

SHRI PIUS TIRKEY (Alipurduars): Mr. Chairman, Sir, though I support the Bill, yet I would say that it is a very unfortunate step. Some mention has been made about the welfare of the workers and the Government is thinking to make payment to the workers.

[*English*]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Gentlemen, the House stands adjourned to meet tomorrow at 11 o'clock. Shri Tiraky is on his feet and will continue tomorrow when the House takes up this item.

18.01 hrs.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock on Friday. the 29th November, 1991/Agrahayana 8, 1913 (Saka).

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